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**Is it better to be both Nice and Nasty? Investigating the Co-Occurrence of Sales  
Manager Aggressiveness and Caring**

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## **Abstract**

Empirical research has largely neglected to investigate the issue of sales manager's problem resolution styles in handling conflicts. Building on the qualitative work of Lee and Cadogan (2009), we investigate how sales manager's problem resolution styles, as reflected in both caring and aggressive interpersonal interactions with their salespeople, impact important sales force outcomes. The results show that depending on the level of caring that manager exhibits during the problem resolution process, the curvilinear effects of aggressiveness on salespeople emotional exhaustion and sportsmanship are dramatically altered. Our findings are interesting, and suggest that the almost wholly negative picture painted in current academic literature regarding aggressive managerial style is at least somewhat simplistic, and perhaps rather overstated. Therefore aggressiveness and caring further should be considered together, rather than separately.

**Keywords:** problem resolution styles; sales manager's aggressiveness; sales manager's caring

# Is it better to be both Nice and Nasty? Investigating the Co-Occurrence of Sales Manager Aggressiveness and Caring

## 1. Introduction

*'...nice [managers] can actually finish first, as long as they use the right strategies that prevent others from taking advantage of them.'* (Seppala, 2014, Emphasis added)

*'...to build a good leader, you perhaps have to build on a foundation of "bad" qualities—that classic **nasty** competitive streak... that lets them get things done'* (Asghar, 2014, Emphasis added)

It is common in the business press to see managers being portrayed at turns in either a positive manner as being “nice”, or in a negative manner as being “nasty”, to their subordinate employees. Case studies in the business press present contrasting pictures of effectiveness in this regard, and there is little consensus regarding which is most effective for a manager. Indeed, *both* types of manager have been portrayed as effective by commentators (Asghar, 2014; Seppala, 2014). Scholars too echo the business press by portraying managers' supervisory styles either as positive or negative, although here the picture is rather more favorable towards positive managers. Research investigating positive supervisory styles highlights the caring nature of managers (Eder & Eisenberger, 2008; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), showing that caring managers have a positive effect on job satisfaction, positive mood, and reduced stress of employees. Research investigating negative supervisory styles mainly focuses on workplace aggression (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Tepper, Moss, Lockhart & Carr, 2007). Such work finds no benefit in what the business press would call ‘nasty’ management, suggesting that aggression is associated with a plethora of negative outcomes, including poor employee performance (Peng, Schaubroeck, & Li, 2014), deviant work-related behavior (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007) and increased employee turnover (Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002).

While both positive and negative portrayals of managers have separately found ready acceptance within academic circles, spawning large amounts of research, the effects of joint occurrences of positive and negative supervision styles have received almost no academic interest. Indeed, it is unlikely that these managerial styles always operate in total isolation of one another (e.g. Seppala, 2014), and therefore investigations based solely on investigating either a positive or negative supervision style of managers may be ineffective at best, and counterproductive at worst. In the present study, we examine the interplay of these two styles on employee consequences.

In doing so, we draw on the concept of *sales manager problem resolution styles* (Lee & Cadogan, 2009) to argue that negative (aggressive) and positive (caring) problem resolution styles (hereinafter PRSs) are best thought of as *together* determining the consequences of employee wellbeing. In particular, we place our investigation within the area of sales manager – salespeople interaction. By the boundary spanning nature of their job, salespeople are particularly directed towards their sales managers as their single most important contact with the organization. Sales managers are responsible for supporting the ability of salespeople to do their job. This creates a massive burden on the sales manager, who must resolve salespeople related issues to alleviate under-performance among salespeople, and provide guidance to support salespeople, or even sanction unacceptable behavior (Lee & Cadogan, 2009). In the present paper, we address these managerial challenges by answering the following question: What is the simultaneous impact of *caring and aggressive problem resolution styles* on employee outcomes?

This paper contributes to both theory and practice by providing evidence of the simultaneous existence and importance of both positive and negative sales manager PRSs on key sales force consequences. In theoretical terms, we add to the management and sales literature in several ways. One contribution of this research is the overt academic recognition

of an area of sales management - problem resolution - which, although seemingly important on a practical level, appears to have received little attention by sales scholars. Past academic studies on the various problems salespeople may cause, can be classified into organizational control literature, vertical-exchange theory and transactional leadership. These studies provide implicit recommendations for managerial response to problem situations, but do not systematically examine how sales managers can actually *implement* the recommended behaviors when dealing with problem situations. The present study provides the first empirical testing of how sales managers actually go about implementing behaviors designed to resolve problems (Lee & Cadogan, 2009).

Second, the study contributes to the evolving discourse on sales, by providing support for construct interrelationships previously proposed in the literature (i.e. sales manager's aggressiveness and caring problem resolution style) but that have remained relatively unnoticed throughout the evolution of scholarly sales research. Further, by acknowledging the simultaneous presence of "nasty" and "nice" managerial PRS we acknowledge the co-existence of a variety of managerial behaviors and as such capture a more realistic picture of managers' supervision styles.

Finally, we argue and show that salespeople job satisfaction, can be influenced by both internal emotional states (i.e. emotional exhaustion) and outward behavioral expressions (i.e. sportsmanship), both being consequence of perceived PRS used from sales manager. In doing so, our results provide the first indications of exactly how the interplay between two sales manager PRS influences both the emotional exhaustion of salespeople, and their sportsmanship. Results indicate that depending on the level of caring that managers exhibit during the problem resolution process, the effects of aggressiveness on salespeople emotional exhaustion are altered. Similarly, we also find that, depending on the level of caring that managers exhibit during the problem resolution process, the effects of aggressiveness on

salespeople sportsmanship are also altered. This is further evidence of the importance of accounting for the simultaneous existence and influence of a variety of managerial styles on employee outcomes such as job satisfaction. In this sense, our results also provide a significant contribution to management research in general, beyond the sales context. Specifically, to our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the simultaneous effects of positive (caring) and negative (aggression) PRSs. In doing so we provide a welcome counterpoint to existing studies, which may paint an overly simplistic picture of real managerial life. Here, we show that managers should not be thought of as either nasty or nice, but rather a little of both.

In managerial terms, we offer important implications for sales managers in particular, and managers in general. The question of how managers can best resolve day-to-day problems is an important and relevant one. Currently, the advice for sales managers is uni-dimensional, taking either the “good” manager route or the “bad” route. Indeed, most scholarly research pushes managers down the ‘good’ route, and definitely away from aggressiveness (e.g. Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Vogel et al., 2015). However, our model acknowledges the presence of both styles, and suggests that they *jointly* affect key outcomes. As a result, this study takes a fresh perspective for sales managers, offering more fine-grained recommendations with regards to potential benefits and drawbacks of combining aggressiveness with a caring PRS. In fact, our results show that medium-level of aggressiveness, combined with a high-level of caring may actually be the optimal combination.

## **2. Sales manager’s problem resolution styles in interactions with salespeople**

Recent literature suggests that a substantial proportion of the sales manager’s daily time is taken up with dealing with specific ‘problem situations’ involving the sales force (Rapp, 2012). Dealing with these situations is likely to have various intentions, such as preventing

poor performance, raising performance to new heights, or dealing with the exhibition of inappropriate behavior (e.g. unethical selling behavior, or inappropriate social behavior). While few studies explicitly recognize these situations, various fields of literature (e.g. organizational control literature, vertical-exchange theory, transactional leadership theory) appear to offer some guidance in how sales managers may respond to these problem situations. Nevertheless, studies in the above-mentioned fields deal with the issue of problem resolution only by implication, and are focused primarily on the behavioral options which are open to the sales manager too respond to problem situations. However, some aspects remain untouched by the literature. In particular, what is missing from the sales literature so far is an appreciation of how sales managers actually go about *implementing* the behaviors recommended by various theories, or in other words, what could be called sales manager PRS. Apart from anecdotal evidence advocating the importance of sales manager's delivery methods for sales people's performance (e.g. Oechsli, 1993) and a single qualitative study on sales manager PRS (Lee & Cadogan, 2009) academic literature remains silent on consequences of various PRSs.

In theoretical terms, sales manager PRSs can be broadly conceptualized as the ways in which sales managers implement their interactions with salespeople when dealing with problem situations (e.g. general performance improvement, or responding to lack of goal attainment etc. see Lee & Cadogan 2009). Given that salesperson–manager interactions contribute significantly to the success and well-being of individual salespeople and sales teams (e.g. Lagace, Castleberry, & Ridnour, 1993), we focus on two previously-identified but under-explored aspects underpinning salesperson–manager interactions within problem resolution conditions (Lee & Cadogan, 2009), sales manager's aggressiveness (*SMA<sub>PRS</sub>*) and sales manager's caring (*SMC<sub>PRS</sub>*). Next, we discuss the literature on *SMA<sub>PRS</sub>* and *SMC<sub>PRS</sub>* and the relation between the two.



## *2.1. Sales manager's aggressive and caring problem resolution styles*

### *2.1.1. Sales manager aggressive problem resolution style (SMA<sub>PRS</sub>)*

The past two decades have witnessed an increase in academic interest in the topic of workplace aggression. The number of terms, proposed constructs and approaches to the issue have followed this trend as well (for a comprehensive list please see Hershcovis & Reich, 2013). In broad terms workplace aggression denotes premeditated and hostile work-related negative acts by the individual in a position of power over the intended target that cause injury and harm to the target of such aggression (Neuman & Baron 2005; Burton, Hoobler & Scheuer, 2012).

However, it seems plausible to suggest that some actions may be seen as aggressive by the observers and recipients of such actions, while not necessarily having harmful intentions from the sender. Such 'aggressiveness' may drive potential negative consequences, regardless of the actual intention. Thus, focusing on the premeditated intentions (as most of the current workplace aggression concepts assume) does not fully capture the essence of aggression in general. It seems likely that in a real-world sales force context, sales managers may utilize hostile styles only occasionally (for example when under duress), rather than systematically and/or over a sustained period as defined by Tepper (2000). For example, the pressure inherent to problem resolution situations (Butterfield, Trevino & Ball, 1996) may cause sales managers to exhibit 'hostility' during the resolution delivery process (e.g. shouting) but not either over a sustained period, or as a general rule/behavior.

Idea of sales manager's aggression in PRS is based on definition proposed by Geen (1990 p. 3), that aggression "consists of the delivery of noxious stimuli by one organism to another". A key point to note is that this definition does not necessitate a *deliberate* attempt by an aggressive sales manager to harm the salesperson subordinate, and thus disregards the intentions of the aggressor. In the present case, it is clear to see that sales manager PRSs are

related to contingent behavior (whether or not they be punished specifically), since the sales manager is reacting to an undesirable behavior by the salesperson. By contrast, non-contingent sales manager punishment would be if say, the sales manager randomly sacked sales reps at the annual sales meeting. By contrast it is clear that literature dealing with abusive supervision and workplace aggression as discussed earlier specifies the deliberate application of noxious stimuli as a key part of the conceptual definition (cf. Tepper 2000; Neuman & Baron 1998). In the present study however, the aggressiveness in sales manager problem resolution is defined as “physically demonstrative and/or intimidating behavior directed towards salespeople” when dealing with problems that salespeople cause (Lee & Cadogan, 2009, p. 3). An aggressive sales manager is one who, when delivering problem resolution action, is physically or otherwise demonstrative, hostile, and/or intimidating towards the salesperson they are dealing with. For example they may come across as tough, uncompromising, verbally aggressive or confrontational.

#### *2.1.2. Sales manager's caring problem resolution style (SMC<sub>PRS</sub>)*

While, SMA<sub>PRS</sub> as described above is a relatively objective concept, it is also likely that more subjective, or ‘softer’ variables will also characterize sales managers’ responses to problems (Lee & Cadogan, 2009). Existing research (e.g. transformational leadership, leader-member exchange, perceived organizational support) indicates that support and consideration from the sales manager may well be important when resolving problem situations. Studies within the fields of education and nursing have made attempts to conceptualize the concept of managerial care. Managerial care suggests managerial attempts to understand employees and their potential and assist them in their growth accordingly (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Mayeroff, 1971; Kroth & Keeler, 2009). Such care entitles employee encouragement and motivation as well as the support provided to the employee through work-related difficulties (Mayeroff, 1971). It has a sense of taking into consideration

and promoting the employee's best interests and valuing his/her contributions (Derry, 1999; Tronto, 1998).

While it can be seen that concepts related to caring in general appear across various different fields of study, the concept of sales manager caring, as approached here, is an explicit attempt to delineate exactly how caring is exhibited in specific instances of salesperson-related problem resolution situations.  $SMC_{PRS}$  is associated with sales managers' concern with the underlying reasons for problems, and providing support in dealing with them, rather than a sole focus on performance targets and quotas (Lee & Cadogan, 2009). The sales manager who uses  $SMC_{PRS}$  is one who is concerned with helping salespeople perform to the best of their ability, rather than simply punishing them for poor performance or other undesirable behaviors. Furthermore, the  $SMC_{PRS}$  assumes being sympathetic to the various external factors which can cause problems for the salespeople (for example family problems, or market problems). Some of the typical descriptions of highly  $SMC_{PRS}$  are: "sensitive", "considerate", "sympathetic", "understanding" (Lee & Cadogan, 2009) approach to problem resolutions. By contrast, less caring PRS would mean that sales manager is not interested in the salesperson at a personal level to the same extent, and focus more on salespeople's place within the organization's performance when resolving issues.

## *2.2. $SMA_{PRS}$ and $SMC_{PRS}$ as a joint occurrence*

While concepts related to caring and aggression have to date generally been investigated separately in the scholarly management literature (supervision, abuse, concern), evidence can be found in other fields regarding the co-existence of both. Such occurrences are not uncommon in sports contexts, where trainers often exhibit what has been termed "tough love". Tough love aims at resolving problems and instilling the type of discipline among athletes that empowers them to overcome their disadvantages while at the same time incorporates ideas of caring and devotion to their athletes (Trimbur, 2011). Similarly,

literature on “necessary evils” fully accounts for a conjunction and coexistence of what they term as suffering and compassion in day-to-day organizational life (Frost, 1999). Suffering refers to a broad range of experiences, which can be characterized as unpleasant, traumatic, causing psychological distress and feelings of disengagement, and could be triggered by events in the organization similar to our conceptualization of managerial aggressiveness (see Frost, 2003). Compassion is argued to be inextricably linked to suffering, as it implies the awareness of suffering and accordant compassionate responding (Lilius et al., 2008). Employees experiencing compassion at work are more likely to exhibit higher levels of key employee related outcomes, such as positive emotions at work, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g. Dutton, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Taken together, the literature on tough love and necessary evils provides strong evidence for the joint occurrence of  $SMA_{PRS}$  and  $SMC_{PRS}$ .

### *2.3 Salespeople’s emotional exhaustion, sportsmanship and job satisfaction*

Below, attention is given on emotional exhaustion as an internal emotional state, and salesperson sportsmanship as an outward behavioral expression of salespeople’s attitude towards their job, which are strong indicators of salespeople’s attitude towards their job, and thus very likely to be influenced by sales managers’ PRSs as described above.

*Emotional exhaustion* has received significant attention within sales management research (e.g. Babakus, Cravens, Johnston, & Moncrief, 1999; Jaramillo, Mulki, & Solomon, 2006), with Boles, Johnstone and Hair (1997) asserting that “emotional exhaustion appears to be most prevalent among workers in boundary spanning positions such as salespeople” (p. 19). It seems likely that sales managers’ levels of aggressiveness and caring when delivering problem resolution action will have an important effect on sales force emotional exhaustion. Contrary to normal daily interactions, problem resolution situations are often highly emotionally charged and traumatic for salespeople (Butterfield et al., 1996). For example, it

has repeatedly been shown that the recipients of abusive supervision experience higher levels of detrimental psychological consequences (e.g. Duffy et al., 2002). Among these consequences the most commonly-researched is emotional exhaustion (e.g. Tepper, 2000; 2007). In particular, salespeople with abusive managers are likely to have a higher number of unpleasant and stressful interactions with those managers, and even those salespeople who do not directly experience the aggressiveness first hand will be aware of an uncomfortable psychological environment within the team, also increasing emotional exhaustion (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 1996). While as detailed above, abusive supervision and SMA<sub>PRS</sub> are not synonymous, there does seem ample evidence to suggest a relationship between SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, sales managers who are higher in caring will be more able to foster the perception of sympathy and understanding towards their salespeople, two components of socio-emotional support (cf. Thoits, 1995), which has been consistently linked to workplace stress (e.g. Cohen & Wills, 1985; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). Research has also find that increased levels of supervisor support can have a preventative effect on levels of burnout in sales context (Sand & Miyazaki, 2000; Singh, 2000).

*Sportsmanship.* The concept of sportsmanship has its roots in the Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) literature (cf. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and together with civic-virtue taps into the specific types of employee behavior which reflects a direct placement by the employee of the organization's benefit above their own (e.g. MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1993). In a formal sense, sportsmanship is defined as a citizen-like posture of "willingness to tolerate the inevitable inconveniences and impositions of work without complaining" (Organ, 1990, p. 96). According to Podsakoff et al. (2000), this definition entails several employee behaviors,

based around maintaining positive attitude, not complaining, and sacrificing personal interest for the firm.

Although the majority of research in workplace aggression has focused on the psychological effects of abusive and aggressive supervision, few if any studies have asserted the potential impact of abusive supervision on OCBs (Tepper, Duffy, Hoobler, & Ensley, 2004; Zellars, Tepper, & Duffy, 2002). Research examining the relationship between abusive supervision and OCB draws on a justice perspective, suggesting that employees' feelings of unfair treatment will affect their behavior (Tepper, 2000). On the other hand, drawing from the reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 2013; Wright & Brehm, 1982), research has explained employee reactions to abusive supervision as the employee's attempt to preserve personal control and consequent engagement in a behavior that restores their personal autonomy, i.e. lowering their OCBs (Zellars et al., 2002). In terms of sales manager caring, the interaction between the manager and the employee has been seen as a driver of OCB. More specifically, drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), researchers have related the concepts of manager's caring as a source of motivation for salespeople and linked it to different forms of OCB. According to this approach, employees will engage in a process of reciprocating positive treatment (e.g. caring) with OCBs, and will continue doing so until a change in the environment disrupts this process of reciprocity.

*Job satisfaction* has been repeatedly connected to emotional exhaustion and OCB in the sales force (Babakus et al., 1999; Jaramillo et al., 2006; Park & Deitz, 2006). Job satisfaction relates to a pleasurable emotional state originating from an individual's evaluation of their job experiences (cf. Brown & Peterson, 1993), and thus is a factor internal to an individual. Emotional exhaustion as key influence on the psychological welfare of employees, is likely to include feelings of job satisfaction. Furthermore, research provides

strong empirical support for the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (e.g. Jaramillo et al., 2006; Low, Cravens, Grant, & Moncrief, 2001).

Although the relationship between sportsmanship and job satisfaction has been frequently investigated, the direction of this relationship is far from clear. For example, numerous authors have discovered that increased job satisfaction has a positive influence on OCBs such as sportsmanship (e.g. Mackenzie et al., 1998; Netemeyer, Boles, McKee, & McMurrian, 1997; Podsakoff et al. 2000), while Organ and Ryan (1995) report that in general job satisfaction has a direct positive influence on sportsmanship. Grounded in self-perception theory, the directionality of the behavior (e.g. OCBs) - attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction) link is explained through an attributional process of inference and observation (Bem, 1967). That is, attitudes represent an individual's appraisal of their past and current behavior. Therefore, behavior drives attitudinal evaluations. Here, we follow this logic, and argue that employees cognitively evaluate the level of investments made in their exchange relationship with the supervisor (which will be affected by the manager's PRS) in terms of sportsmanship and based on the perceived instrumentality of their behavior (cost and benefits), which further infers their attitudes towards the job (i.e. job satisfaction).

### **3. Conceptual model and research hypotheses**

Literature on necessary evils supports the general idea of the coexistence of two seemingly opposite managerial styles – aggressiveness and caring (Frost, 1999). More specifically, it is perfectly possible that a sales manager dealing with a problem can exhibit high levels of both caring and aggressiveness. As an example, the latter could use SMA<sub>PRS</sub> in order to 'get their point across' more forcefully to a sales person who has great potential but is not performing well (many parents may empathize with such an approach). This approach would echo the old adage of being 'cruel to be kind', or the 'tough love' discussed in sports coaching literature (e.g. Trimbur, 2011). Indeed, literature investigating "necessary evils"

asserts that it is not uncommon, and is even inevitable, that managers may cause harm and suffering to their subordinates as a means of achieving a greater good (Molinsky & Margolis, 2005).

That said, work in organizational settings asserts the key role of acting with compassion, and treating employees with interpersonal sensitivity, specifically for those managers engaging in potentially harmful behavior such as aggression (e.g. Mishra, Mishra, & Spreitzer, 2009). Combining unpleasant decision making on one hand and interpersonal sensitivity on the other, reduces the harm and negative reactions of the employees (e.g. Brockner, 2002; Frost, Dutton, Worline, & Wilson, 2000). Hence, sales managers who also exhibit caring behavior during problem resolution situations will foster an atmosphere of concern and support (Lee & Cadogan, 2009). In instances in which sales managers combine a SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> they signal to salespeople that they are passionate about improving their performance, perhaps helping to create a high-performance team culture and that his actions are for the benefits of salespeople. Such managers exhibit a ‘tough love’ that aims at resolving problems and instilling the type of discipline among salespeople that empowers them to overcome their disadvantages (Trimbur, 2011).

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Fig. 1 about here

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Drawing from the above, below we develop theory relating to the simultaneous effect of SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> on salespeople outcomes, as depicted in Figure 1. Specifically, we argue that job satisfaction of salespeople is impacted by SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> through both the internal emotional states (i.e. emotional exhaustion) and outward behavioral expressions (i.e. sportsmanship) of salespeople.

### *3.1. The interactive effects of SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> on salespeople's emotional exhaustion*

Instances of tough love as discussed above incorporate the ideas of caring and devotion while at the same time acknowledging the high demands and tough realities of the sales



environment. As such, we suggest that, at high levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$  one should observe a generally quadratic (U-shaped) relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and emotional exhaustion, such that the lowest levels of emotional exhaustion among salespeople are observed when managers exhibit a combination of moderate  $SMA_{PRS}$  and high  $SMC_{PRS}$ . In such cases, moderate levels of  $SMA_{PRS}$  may not be a major source of emotional exhaustion, because  $SMC_{PRS}$  will cushion the blow of  $SMA_{PRS}$  on salespeople. On the other hand, both very low and very high  $SMA_{PRS}$ , when combined with high  $SMC_{PRS}$ , may actually increase salespeople's emotional exhaustion over this minimum. Low  $SMA_{PRS}$  is generally associated by salespeople with an essentially inactive, submissive, or weak, approach to solving problem situations (Lee & Cadogan, 2009), analogous to an inertness or passiveness (Cangemi, Miller & Holloper, 2002), even though high  $SMC_{PRS}$  may increase impressions of the social support and suchlike (Thoits, 1995), salespeople here may exhibit higher emotional exhaustion due to perceiving their manager as 'nice but weak' (e.g. Lee & Cadogan, 2009; Mattson, 2015), and unable to help them achieve high performance standards, or deal with troublesome colleagues. At the other end of the spectrum, extremely high level of  $SMA_{PRS}$  will likely push salespeople beyond an emotional demands they can deal with, giving  $SMC_{PRS}$  little chance to cushion the blow of unpleasant interactions (Cooper, Quick, & Schabracq, 2009).

As the exhibition of  $SMC_{PRS}$  by the manager decreases, we expect the quadratic form of the relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and emotional exhaustion to flatten somewhat. At low levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$ , salespeople will fail to interpret a manager's motive for  $SMA_{PRS}$  as an attempt at promoting higher sales performance, resulting in higher levels of emotional exhaustion due to increasingly negative interactions with their sales manager, as  $SMA_{PRS}$  increases. However, we expect the maximum level of emotional exhaustion experienced by salespeople to occur not at the maximum level of  $SMA_{PRS}$  here, but at a more moderate level.

Specifically, salespeople whose managers exhibit very high  $SMA_{PRS}$ , with low  $SMC_{PRS}$ , are likely to disengage emotionally with the organization and the manager as a proactive attempt for restoration of their feelings of freedom and control affected by destructive use of power from subordinates (usually associated with abusive supervision) (e.g. Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Brehm, 2013; Harrell-Cook, Ferris, & Dulebohn, 1999; Wayne, Liden, & Sparrowe, 1994). This disengagement will likely be physical if possible (since many salespeople are able to work remotely), ensuring less contact with the manager and thus less emotional exhaustion caused by exposure to their behaviors. However, even if complete face to face disengagement is not possible, salespeople with low  $SMC_{PRS}$ /high  $SMA_{PRS}$  may also essentially ‘switch off’, and engage at the minimum level. As such, we expect the relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and emotional exhaustion to actually approximate a negative quadratic at low levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$ . In light of the above theory, which takes in the effects of different combinations of  $SMC_{PRS}$  and  $SMA_{PRS}$ , we formally hypothesize:

H1: As  $SMC_{PRS}$  decreases, the quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and Emotional Exhaustion that is observed at high  $SMC_{PRS}$  will flatten and eventually flip to a negative quadratic at low levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$ .

### *3.2. The interactive effects of $SMA_{PRS}$ and $SMC_{PRS}$ on salespeople’s sportsmanship*

We theorize that, at high levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$ , one should observe a generally negative quadratic form (inverted-U) to the relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and salesperson sportsmanship, such that the highest levels of salesperson sportsmanship are observed when managers resolve problems using a style that combines a moderate level of  $SMA_{PRS}$ , with a high level of  $SMC_{PRS}$ . In such cases, sales managers clearly show that certain situations are unacceptable, as a means to both motivating low performers to try harder, and signal to high performers that low performers will not receive special treatment or consume additional resources. As such, salespeople may feel that the sales manager is passionate about

improving their performance, which in turn brings a variety of positive outcomes to salespeople, such as promotions, compensation, and sense of accomplishment (Carmeli, Shalom, & Weisberg, 2007). Employees who perceive such positive reasoning for the sales manager's treatment will judge the managerial approach as fair treatment and are maybe even likely to develop closer relationships with their supervisors (Mackenzie et al., 1998), seeing them as role models. Social exchange theory postulates that investments in the relationship will motivate salespeople to reciprocate and as a result will engage in sportsmanship (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ, 1997). In such instances salespeople will not shy away from placing the organization's benefit above their own (Mackenzie et al., 1998; Mackenzie et al., 1993).

However, managers who are high in  $SMC_{PRS}$ , but lower in  $SMA_{PRS}$  will fail to act as inspiring role models to learn from. While they exhibit caring, such managers as discussed above may be seen as weak, and fail to instill the value of "playing to win" in their salespeople. Such an approach will alter salespeople's motivation to engage in sportsmanship behaviors, since they will not view their sales manager as equally willing to 'go the extra mile'. Further, even when combined with high  $SMC_{PRS}$ ,  $SMA_{PRS}$  will not have a continuously increasing positive effect on sportsmanship. Indeed, very high levels of  $SMA_{PRS}$  and  $SMC_{PRS}$  will send conflicting messages to salespeople and eventually the positive effects of  $SMC_{PRS}$  will be outweighed. Coupled with the internal tensions created from the perceptions of lack of fairness associated with being treated in a highly aggressive manner (Tepper, 2000), this will ultimately result in salespeople refraining from investing the additional resources required to exhibit sportsmanship behavior.

As  $SMC_{PRS}$  decreases, we expect the negative quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and sportsmanship to flatten. In such cases,  $SMA_{PRS}$  is unlikely to be perceived by salespeople as aimed at performance improvement, but instead as a way of "venting"

negative emotions by the manager. Research investigating the personal costs associated with citizenship has generally proposed the high costs and demands required for engaging in OCB (Bergeron, 2007). Sportsmanship as a dimension of OCB requires investment of additional cognitive, emotional and physical resources from salespeople (Bolino, Hsiung, Harvey, & LePine, 2015). Furthermore, social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) posits that additional investments by managers in the relationship, motivates salespeople to reciprocate (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Brashear, Boles, Bellenger & Brooks, 2003). Thus, in a situation of low  $SMC_{PRS}$ , increasing  $SMA_{PRS}$  may lead to a decreasing amount of salesperson sportsmanship, as salespeople will perceive engagement in sportsmanship as a highly costly behavior with such costs exceeding the investments from the manager's side. Bringing the above theory together, we formally hypothesize:

H2: As  $SMC_{PRS}$  decreases, the inverse quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and Sportsmanship that is observed at high  $SMC_{PRS}$  will flatten to a quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and sportsmanship at low  $SMC_{PRS}$ .

Although our proposed conceptual framework is primarily related to the consequences of  $SMA_{PRS}$  and  $SMC_{PRS}$ , it is placed within the personal selling context. Therefore, we focus on a key outcome of interest for sales scholars, i.e. job satisfaction (Jaramillo et al., 2006; Menguc, Auh, Katsikeas, & Jung, 2016; Park & Deitz, 2006). Job satisfaction relates to an individual's pleasurable emotional state originating from their evaluation of their job experiences (cf. Brown & Peterson, 1993). Employees that are emotionally exhausted often feel weak, their self-esteem is low, with a strong lack of accomplishment (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Moore, 2000), making them incapable of performing well. This results in frustration, that makes them lose interest in their work (Babakus et al., 1999), becoming negative towards customers, and organization (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), making them more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs (Abraham, 1998). Sales research provides strong

empirical support for the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (Jaramillo et al., 2006; Low et. al., 2001). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H3: Higher levels of emotional exhaustion experienced by salespeople will be associated with lower levels of job satisfaction for those salespeople.

Employee citizenship outcomes such as sportsmanship have long been of interest to scholars (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). However, studies that examine influence of sportsmanship on job satisfaction are scarce, although it has been repeatedly suggested that sportsmanship may influence employee attitudes such as job satisfaction (e.g. Bolino, Turnley, & Niehoff, 2004; Munyon, Hochwarter, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2010; Tepper et al., 2004). Specifically, while at first glance it may be intuitively attractive to suggest that job satisfaction may influence sportsmanship, the relationship between sportsmanship and job satisfaction can be well-explained using self-perception theory (Bem, 1967). Salespeople's attitude towards their job (i.e. job satisfaction) is a result of salespeople attributional process of inference and observation of their own prior sportsmanship behavior. Salespeople who exhibit higher levels of sportsmanship are those who are less likely to complain, and look to pick fault in their environment (Podsakoff et al., 2009). As such, high level of sportsmanship increases positive behaviors such as 'going the extra mile' for the organization, reduces complaints, and thus leads to creation of positive attitudes toward their job. Therefore it is hypothesized:

H4: Higher levels of sportsmanship will be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction for those salespeople.

## **4. Methods**

### *4.1. Data collection and sample*

To test our hypotheses we conducted a survey of UK sales representatives. It is a challenge to obtain an accurate database of sales representatives working in sales organizations. The authors overcame this challenge by using a three-step approach to finalize a list of sales organizations where the survey will be administered. First, a random sample of 30 large sales organizations was extracted from a commercial business directory (provided by Kompass). All 30 organizations were contacted, and 18 seriously considered whether they wanted to administer the survey in their organization. Finally, 10 sales organizations agreed to administer the survey to their sales force.

The unit of analysis is individual full-time salespeople, that have direct contact with their customers (e.g. their job roles correspond to the Consultative Seller as per Moncrief, Marshall & Lassk's [2006] taxonomy), with a minimum of a year's tenure working with an identifiable sales manager (necessary in order to assess the manager's PRS). Salespeople were approached in two stages. First, sales managers were asked to deliver the questionnaire to sales representatives. Sales managers were given an instruction sheet as to how to administer the questionnaire and the authors requested the co-operation of sales managers in distributing the questionnaires to their salespeople. Each sales manager was given as many questionnaire packs as they had salespeople. Each pack was a sealed envelope containing a paper questionnaire, a cover letter, and a prepaid envelope for the anonymous return of the questionnaire direct to the authors. This avoided the step of returning questionnaires to sales managers, which may have biased the results. Such a two stage approach is well established in the sales literature (e.g. Oliver & Anderson, 1994). In total, the survey was administered to 317 sales representatives. The procedure of anonymous questionnaire administration prevented the following up of the respondents directly, therefore the authors followed up with the contact person assigned by firm thrice over telephone to help ensure that the survey was administered properly. Finally, 143 useable questionnaires were obtained, resulting in a

response rate of 45%, which is generally in accordance with prior sales studies (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The demographics of the sample are presented on Table 1.

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Table 1 here

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Consistent with past research, our data shows a significant gender bias towards males (e.g. Bellizzi, 1995). Respondents came from various sales organizations, both B2B-only, and a mix of B2B and B2C. All the organizations offered products that differed from one another. The specific industries represented in the data collection efforts included telecommunications, financial services, pharmaceuticals, and consumer goods wholesaling. As non-response bias can compromise the validity of a study's results (Armstrong & Overton, 1977), we tested for it. Assuming that later respondents are more similar to non-respondents, we compared early with late respondents on construct means and socio-demographical characteristics (Armstrong & Overton, 1977) finding no significant differences.

#### *4.2. Measures*

To capture emotional exhaustion, the widely used multi-dimensional burnout (of which emotional exhaustion is a sub-dimension) inventory was used (e.g. Babakus et al., 1999; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Job satisfaction was measured using a short version of the well-established INDSALES (Churchill, Ford, & Walker, 1974), proposed by Comer, Machleit and Lagace (1989). To measure sales manager aggressiveness and caring, we first generated a preliminary list of items based on the conceptual definitions provided by Lee and Cadogan (2009), who used 19 in-depth interviews with sales representatives and sales managers to develop the concepts. This preliminary list of items was discussed with an international panel of five leading sales academics. Based on their feedback, the authors modified the list and pre-tested items on a sample of 39 sales representatives. The remaining items were purified after data collection (see below) using well-established procedures (e.g. Churchill, 1979;

DeVellis, 1991; Spector 1992). Specifically, analysis was conducted via exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha, followed by confirmatory factor analysis (see below).<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.3. Model evaluation

*Measurement model assessment.* Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the full measurement model was run using LISREL 8.71, with the maximum likelihood estimation procedure. As shown in Table 2, the measurement model achieved an acceptable model fit to the data. Specifically, the normed chi-square (i.e.  $\chi^2/\text{d.f.}=123.72/94$ ) of 1.32 is acceptable (Bentler & Chou, 1987), as well is the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=0.047; non-normed fit index (NNFI)=0.973; comparative fit index (CFI)=0.979; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)=0.07. Additionally, each observed indicator loads strongly and significantly on the appropriate latent construct. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) both exceed the recommended standard of 0.60 and 0.50, respectively (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) for each construct. To test for discriminant validity, the approach advocated by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was followed. AVEs for each construct were compared with the shared variances (squared correlations) between pairs of constructs. As reported in Table 3, in all instances the AVE values are larger than the shared variances.

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Tables 2 and 3 here

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In order to alleviate concerns regarding common method variance (CMV), procedural remedies and statistical tests proposed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Podsakoff and Lee (2003) were applied. First, to avoid potential identification of items describing the same factor, reflective items were scattered throughout the questionnaire. Second, different scale formats were applied for measuring constructs. Third, respondents were assured of a) their

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<sup>1</sup> Full details on the scale development procedure are available from the authors upon request, due to space restrictions



anonymity, and b) that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions. While the potential for common method bias can be minimized via such procedural remedies, the statistical tests proposed by Podsakoff et al. (2003) were also conducted. First, Harman's single-factor test was performed. The poor model fit ( $\chi^2=783.30$ ;  $df=90$ ;  $RMSEA=0.233$ ;  $NNFI=0.533$ ;  $CFI=0.600$ ;  $SRMR=0.189$ ) indicates a likely absence of CMV in our data. In addition all items were correlated with a measure of social desirability bias (SDB, the most probable source of bias, see Crowne & Marlowe, [1964]) using the 20-item scale developed by Strahan and Gerbasi (1972). Any items which had significant correlation with SDB were transformed by regressing them against SDB and using the standardized regression residual as the item score, rather than the raw item score (cf. Ganster, Hennessey, & Luthans, 1983).

*Structural model assessment.* To test the hypotheses, LISREL 8.71 with maximum likelihood estimation was also applied. To test the nonlinear interactions, standard product-term analysis (Ping, 1995) was performed, which requires that a series of multiplicative product terms be created and estimated sequentially in the model. Because, H1 and H2 argue that  $SMC_{PRS}$  changes the form of the quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and sales representatives' emotional exhaustion and  $SMA_{PRS}$  and sportsmanship, a product term was created by multiplying the squared term of  $SMA_{PRS}$  with  $SMC_{PRS}$ . To ensure that the model is parsimonious, recommended procedures were followed (Aiken & West, 1991) and all lower-order interaction terms were included in the model (e.g.,  $SMA_{PRS} \times SMC_{PRS}$ ,  $SMA_{PRS}^2$ ) together with direct effects, as control variables. Model complexity was reduced by using single item indicators for the latent variables involved in the quadratic and multiplicative terms ( $SMA_{PRS}$  and  $SMC_{PRS}$ , see Ping, 1995), and following Little, Bovaird and Widaman's (2006) procedure for orthogonalizing observed quadratic and interactions. Finally, in our model, we controlled for the effects of as size of the sales team (Guesalaga, 2014) and sales

experience (e.g. Guenzi, Sajtos & Troilo, 2016). In addition, control relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and on job satisfaction is added, in order to depict a full view of the effects.<sup>2</sup>

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Table 4 here

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To test the significance of our hypothesized interactions and moderators, a nested modeling approach was used. In the first model only the linear direct effects are allowed to be estimated freely while the quadratic and interaction terms are fixed at zero. In the second model the quadratic and interaction terms are freely estimated. As the second unconstrained model showed a better fit to data and satisfactory fit heuristics it is used to assess the hypotheses (Table 4). Results presented in Table 4 a show good fit to data (the unconstrained model, fit:  $\chi^2=113.83$ ;  $df=89$ ;  $p=0.039$ ,  $RMSEA=0.044$ ;  $NNFI=0.956$ ;  $CFI=0.971$ ). Results show that  $SMC_{PRS}$  significantly moderates the quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and salesperson emotional exhaustion ( $\beta=0.23$ ;  $p<.05$ ), flipping the observed inverted U-shaped relationship to U-shaped at higher levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$ . In addition, results confirm that  $SMC_{PRS}$  is significant moderator of quadratic relationship between  $SMA_{PRS}$  and salespeople's sportsmanship ( $\beta=-0.21$ ;  $p<.05$ ), such that a shape of the curve is changing as  $SMC_{PRS}$  decreases. In addition to what has been hypothesized results show that at the lowest level of  $SMC_{PRS}$ , the curve is eventually turned into the inverted U-shape. As expected, the study confirmed a negative relationship between salespeople emotional exhaustion and salespeople job satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.25$ ;  $p<.01$ ), and positive relationship between sportsmanship and job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.39$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

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Figures 2a and 2b here

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Figures 2 and 3 provide graphical representations of the curvilinear relationships as per Aiken and West (1991), showing that it is over simplistic to assume that  $SMA_{PRS}$  is uniformly bad. In particular, sales managers who can combine mid-level  $SMA_{PRS}$  with high levels of

SMC<sub>PRS</sub> appear to reap the most benefits. This is in accordance with research on compassion in organizational settings, where a key role of acting with compassion and treating the employees with interpersonal sensitivity is emphasized, especially for those managers engaging in potentially harmful behavior (e.g. Dutton, Frost, Lilius, & Worline, 2006; Mishra et al., 2009). However when sales managers do exhibit low SMC<sub>PRS</sub>, our results indicate a clear negative (inverted U-shaped) relationship between SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and the emotional exhaustion of salespeople, and a U-shaped form between SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and sportsmanship. Here, our results are in accordance with the literature examining employee reactions to highly stressful situations. Schaubroeck and Ganster (1993) for example assert that employees react to high levels of stressors by exhibiting fear and discouragement. In such cases when aggression is high and caring absent, employees' reactive and coping capacities are overwhelmed (Schaubroeck & Ganster, 1993; Singh, 1998) and they tend to simply detach themselves from the sources of stress.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Much existing literature (e.g. on organizational control systems, incentive plans, and the like) gives suggestions and recommendations for different approaches to decision making when managing and motivating people. However, apart from suggesting the kind of decisions that must be made, the actual *implementation* side of a given decision may also influence its effectiveness (Russ, McNeilley, & Comer, 1996). This is the purview of the present research, on PRSs, which suggests that PRS is in essence a way of implementing a given problem resolution action and that a given decision may be implemented in varying ways. We suggest that two different ways of describing these implementation styles are encoded in the constructs SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub>. From a substantive perspective, a primary goal of this study was to establish the simultaneous impact of SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> on internal emotional states

(i.e. emotional exhaustion) and outward behavioral expressions (i.e. sportsmanship) of salespeople, and thus indirectly on their job satisfaction.

Our findings suggest that combining  $SMA_{PRS}$  and  $SMC_{PRS}$  is likely to be beneficial for both the emotional wellbeing (i.e. reduced emotional exhaustion), and positive behavior (i.e. increased sportsmanship) of salespersons. However, sales managers need to take special care regarding the intensity of  $SMA_{PRS}$  and  $SMC_{PRS}$  that they are exhibiting when resolving problems. Specifically, when it is combined with  $SMC_{PRS}$ , salespeople actually appear to favor and welcome a medium amount of  $SMA_{PRS}$ . Practitioner literature sometimes terms this type of sales manager ‘fiery’, one who is demanding and determined and “playing to win” (e.g. Downs, 2015). However, only if employees are truly convinced that the  $SMA_{PRS}$  comes from the manager’s desire to improve salespeople will they accept the manager’s motives, and be willing to stretch themselves and take on demanding workloads in the name of their personal growth (Linkner, 2014). This type of manager will “shock” an employee out of bad performance and engender a desire to strive for higher standards and better performance.  $SMA_{PRS}$  is seen as exhibiting tough love, where “tough” aims at resolving problems and instilling the type of discipline among salespeople required to overcome problems, and “love” incorporates the ideas of caring and devotion while acknowledging these high demands and tough realities of the sales environment (Trimbur, 2011). Such a fine-tuned combination of these seemingly opposite approaches to problem resolution can in fact solve a problem today, but also foster salespeople’s sportsmanship and wellbeing in the longer run. On the other hand, managers high in  $SMC_{PRS}$  and low in  $SMA_{PRS}$  may be well liked by their employees, but if they fail to communicate the purposefulness and determination associated with a medium level of  $SMA_{PRS}$ , they will fail to instill the type of discipline that brings about accountability.

It is also interesting to see from our results that high levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$  are not by themselves always successful. For example, high  $SMC_{PRS}$  combined with low  $SMA_{PRS}$  will result in high emotional exhaustion of employees. We suggest that such managers fail to coerce and put pressure on salespeople when a situation calling for it arises, and will be perceived as weak, being unable to help salespeople deal with the harsh realities of the sales environment (Lee & Cadogan, 2009). Without clear guidance and a focus on performance standards, salespeople will struggle in problem situations under such managers, which fail to act as inspiring role models, and cannot instill the value of “playing to win” to their salespeople. Salespeople in such situations will eventually lose respect for their leadership (Mattson, 2015).

However, we find that simply adding aggression to problem resolution situations is not a uniformly positive solution for the manager. For example, if managers go beyond the optimal level of  $SMA_{PRS}$  discussed earlier - to combine high levels of  $SMC_{PRS}$  with very high  $SMA_{PRS}$  - the positive discipline otherwise associated with medium levels of  $SMA_{PRS}$  (as discussed above) at such high levels of  $SMA_{PRS}$  will likely begin to be perceived as bullying, over-criticizing and picking on salespeople (Mattson, 2015). Such situations may thus leave salespeople questioning the true motives behind these outbursts, outweighing any positive effects of high  $SMC_{PRS}$ . This will leave salespeople confused by the opposing messages they receive from sales managers ( $SMC_{PRS}$  on one side and high  $SMA_{PRS}$  on the other), which will eventually lead to the negative effects we observed in our results.

However, it is the case that in general, higher levels of caring do help managers deliver their problem resolution, and if sales managers are not able to employ a  $SMC_{PRS}$ , then the levels of  $SMA_{PRS}$  that are otherwise not harmful (when combined with a high  $SMC_{PRS}$ ) actually become detrimental. It seems that the  $SMC_{PRS}$  helps salespeople to attribute positive motives to  $SMA_{PRS}$  as perhaps may be perceived at times by an errant child, chastised by

their parents who are ‘only looking out for them’. Absence of belief that the  $SMA_{PRS}$  is directed towards salespeople’s best interest in this way will thus be taken as pure manager’s instrumentalism and self-directed purposefulness with a single-minded focus on numbers and sales targets as aggressiveness increases.

Yet it is particularly interesting that the negative effects of  $SMA_{PRS}$  at low  $SMC_{PRS}$  are observed only up to a point, beyond which increasing aggressiveness leads to decreases in emotional exhaustion, and increases in sportsmanship. We can explain this using the idea that salespeople in situations of high  $SMA_{PRS}$  but low  $SMC_{PRS}$  are likely to disengage emotionally with the organization. Such problem resolution situations are likely to be closest to the contexts that prior scholars have studied in their work on aggression and bullying in the workplace. Tepper (2007), for example, showed that in threatening work situations, individuals commonly engage in avoidance behaviors to alleviate such discomfort. Such behaviors are likely to include sportsmanship, engaged in this case not as a reciprocal investment from the salesperson to the sales manager, but as a team-focused supportive distraction behavior. Further, emotional exhaustion may be reduced due to salespeople essentially ‘switching off’, only engaging at the minimum level and redirecting personal resources away from the sources of stress in an attempt to maintain their personal control (Brehm & Brehm, 2013). Such a situation may not exactly be a positive one for the sales manager-salesperson interaction, but it may be a way of dealing with a very unpleasant environment for salespeople. Similar urge of employees for proactive seeking for restoration of their feelings of freedom and control affected by destructive use of power from subordinates (usually associated with abusive supervision) have been observed by many scholars (e.g. Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Brehm, 2013; Harrell-Cook et al., 1999; Wayne et al., 1994).

Finally, managers who combine both low  $SMC_{PRS}$  and  $SMA_{PRS}$  distance themselves from salespeople altogether, a concept similar to “managerial distancing” proposed by Folger and Skarlicki (1998). Salespeople - faced with the disengaged sales manager, who fails to communicate clearly the purpose and goals for their salespeople and restrain themselves for taking any action when issues arise - will adopt their own set of purposes and goals as a mean of preserving their personal resources (Courtright et al., 2015). We note again though that this not really a positive situation – being that our results still show comparatively high levels of emotional exhaustion, and low levels of sportsmanship (although neither is at the minimum). However, when combined with some of the more ‘actively’ negative influences managers in, for example very high  $SMA_{PRS}$ , combinations can have, perhaps the more *laissez-faire* management style exemplified by low  $SMC_{PRS}$  and low  $SMA_{PRS}$  can have a place, maybe helping salespeople themselves to take control of their own environments, and help each other.

Our findings are interesting, and suggest that the almost wholly negative picture painted in current academic literature regarding  $SMA_{PRS}$  is at least somewhat simplistic, and perhaps rather overstated. Indeed, we define a specific type and context for managerial aggressiveness, in problem resolution situations, where some level of  $SMA_{PRS}$  is actually beneficial to salespeople. Perhaps, it may be that salespeople see  $SMA_{PRS}$  as a necessity in the harsh environment they operate in; therefore, salespeople expect some  $SMA_{PRS}$ , and when just the right amount of  $SMA_{PRS}$  (not too much, not too little, which might be termed the ‘Goldilocks amount’ of aggressiveness) is combined with  $SMC_{PRS}$  it is perceived as “positive aggression”. In other words, to be effective, these two should be combined, as each counterbalances the drawbacks of the other. Finally, the study also contributes to the evolving literature in the general area (e.g. Lewin & Sager, 2009; Vogel et al., 2015) by offering the

first set of operational definitions and measures of the SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> (Lee & Cadogan, 2009).

From a managerial perspective this study offers valuable insights into key consequences within the sales force. In particular, it is not just the quality of managers' decision making that is important, but how they *implement* those decisions in dealing with their salespeople. A specific suggestion to sales managers in this regard is to reconsider their approach to SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> as being either solely good or bad, and also as being mutually exclusive. In other words, the idea of the 'nasty' or 'nice' manager is somewhat outdated, and the best managers may actually combine aspects of both – just as a great sports coach does. Our findings imply that the lowest level of emotional exhaustion and the highest level of sportsmanship of salespersons will be achieved with high SMC<sub>PRS</sub> style combined with medium level SMA<sub>PRS</sub>. Overall though, our study suggests that finding the right balance is the key to successful long term sales management.

Of course, this study is not without limitations. We utilize a sample from a single developed economy, and a primary concern may concern the generalizability of the results. As such we recommend further replication of the study (particularly in emerging or developing economies). At the same time, while the present study provides psychometrically sound operationalizations, the literature would benefit from further research to validate the measures of SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> suggested by this study, to develop more fine grained measures, as well as assess their cross-national equivalence. Interestingly, if SMA<sub>PRS</sub> and SMC<sub>PRS</sub> can be understood as describing various styles in which problem resolution decisions are implemented, one can question the importance of the quality of sales managers' actual decisions relative to style. In other words, is it more important to make the 'right' decision, or to implement the decision well? Further research can take into account this quality dimension of the problem resolution decision, and examine the relative importance of the



style in which a decision is implemented compared to the objective quality of decisions (e.g. results of a good quality decisions implemented in an inappropriate style compared to good quality decision that is being implemented in a more appropriate style). Indeed, a poor quality decision is unlikely to be positively evaluated just because of the style of implementation, but if they are implemented well it is likely they would at least minimize the negative effects on salespeople's psychological aspects compared to poor decisions implemented poorly. Such matching / mismatching between decision quality and implementation looks to be an important direction for future research. Further, perhaps different types of decisions require different styles? For example, staff-related decisions like reprimands may need a different style to changes in sales tactics or the like. Thus, it can be seen that, although the present study provides an important step in understanding the outcomes of sales managers problem resolution styles, additional research is needed to more fully explicate and further contribute to the area.

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**Table 1** Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Result	Characteristic	Result	
Gender of salesperson respondent	%	Education of respondents	%	
	Male	72.0	Postgraduate degree	3.5
	Female	28.0	University degree	23.1
Gender of sales manager	%	Trade qualifications	17.5	
	Male	86.0	‘O’ or ‘A’ levels	26.6
	Female	14.0	GCSE or equivalent	15.4
			High school	6.3
		Other	7.7	
	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age of salespeople	22.0	63.0	38.9	10.8
Sales experience	0.5	44.0	14.5	10.2
Tenure with organization	0.1	40.0	6.5	6.4
Number of people in sales team	1.0	50.0	9.4	6.1

**Table 2** CFA Results

Construct/Items	Loadings
<b>Job satisfaction: CR= 0.898; AVE=0.690</b>	
My work gives me a sense of accomplishment	0.81
My job is exciting	0.73
My work is satisfying	0.94
I'm really doing something worthwhile in my job	0.83
<b>Aggressiveness: CR= 0.820; AVE=0.607</b>	
My manager could be described as 'fiery'	-
My manager tends to shout a lot when dealing with a problem sales person	0.64
Sometimes my manager can be quite harsh	0.85
Sometimes, my manager can be quite threatening when dealing with problem sales people	0.83
<b>Caring: CR= 0.771; AVE=0.529</b>	
My manager deals with problem sales people in a very friendly manner	0.69
My manager seems to be able to put himself in the shoes of a sales person who is causing problems	0.72
My manager seems very sympathetic towards a problem sales person	0.77
My sales manager is something of a counselor when dealing with problem sales people	-
<b>Emotional Exhaustion: CR= 0.847; AVE=0.666</b>	
I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	0.48
I feel burned out from my work	0.93
I feel like I'm at the end of my rope	0.95
<b>Sportsmanship: CR= 0.793; AVE=0.564</b>	
I generally consume a lot of time complaining about trivial matters (R)	0.64
I generally tend to make "mountains out of molehills" (make problems bigger than they are). (R)	0.83
I generally focus on what's wrong with my situation, rather than the positive side of it (R)	0.77
	<b>x<sup>2</sup> p-Value d.f. RMSEA NNFI CFI St.RMR</b>
Measurement model fit:	123.72 0.021 94 0.047 0.973 0.979 0.073

Note: “-” items were deleted during the scale purification process

**Table 3** Construct intercorrelations, descriptive statistics, and discriminant validity.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sportsmanship	<b>0.56</b>	0.18	0.11	0.11	0.02
2. Salespeople Job Satisfaction	0.43	<b>0.69</b>	0.06	0.21	0.10
3. Sales Manager’s Aggressiveness	-0.33	-0.24	<b>0.60</b>	0.36	0.01
4. Sales Manager’s Caring	0.33	0.46	-0.59	<b>0.53</b>	0.01
5. Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion	-0.14	-0.31	0.08	-0.11	<b>0.67</b>

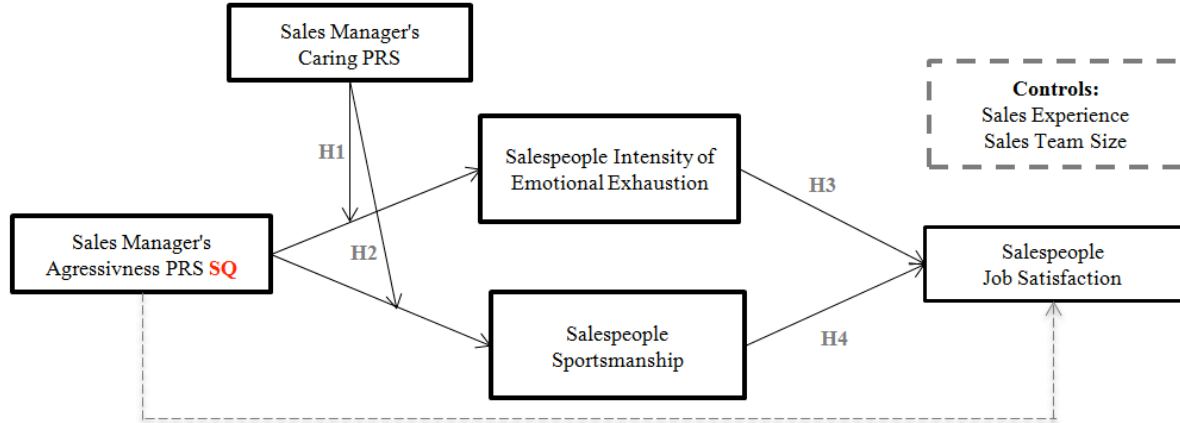
Note: Bold numbers on the diagonal correspond to the AVE; numbers below the diagonal represent inter-construct correlations, number above diagonal corresponds to shared variances extracted (i.e. square of all construct correlations). All correlations are significant at .01 level.

**Table 4** Results of structural equation models: parameter estimates and t-values.

<i>Paths</i>	Unst. estimate	St. estimate	T-value
SMCPRS → Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion	-0.35	-0.18	-1.25
SMAPRS → Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion	-0.09	-0.06	-0.44
SMAPRSsq → Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion	-0.35	-0.35	-1.93*
SMAPRS* SMCPRS → Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion	-0.65	-0.46	-2.51***
SMCPRS → Salespeople Sportsmanship	0.26	0.31	2.08**
SMAPRS → Salespeople Sportsmanship	-0.10	-0.15	-1.08
SMAPRS* SMCPRS → Salespeople Sportsmanship	0.17	0.28	1.52
SMAPRSsq → Salespeople Sportsmanship	0.20	0.46	2.45***
Sales experience → Salespeople job satisfaction	-0.25	-0.36	-3.00
Size of the sales team → Salespeople job satisfaction	0.04	0.06	0.58
SMAPRS → Salespeople job satisfaction	-0.09	-0.12	-1.25
SMAPRSsq → Salespeople job satisfaction	-0.01	-0.01	-0.16
<b>H1: SMAPRSsq*SMCPRS → Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion</b>	0.40	0.24	2.23**
<b>H2: SMAPRSsq*SMCPRS → Salespeople Sportsmanship</b>	-0.16	-0.21	-1.91*
<b>H3: Salespeople Emotional Exhaustion → Salespeople job satisfaction</b>	-0.12	-0.25	-3.08***
<b>H4: Salespeople Sportsmanship → Salespeople job satisfaction</b>	0.39	0.35	3.34***
<b>R2 Job satisfaction</b>	<b>0.206</b>		
<b>R2 Emotional Exhaustion</b>	<b>0.158</b>		
<b>R2 Salespeople Sportsmanship</b>	<b>0.284</b>		

Critical t-value (5%, one-tailed) = 1.645. SMA<sub>PRS</sub>: Sales Manager's Aggressiveness; SMC<sub>PRS</sub>: Sales Manager's Caring; SMC<sub>PRS</sub>sq: Sales Manager's Aggressiveness squared term; Unst. Estimate: unstandardized estimate; St. estimate: standardized estimate

**Fig. 1.** Conceptual model and Hypotheses



**Fig. 2.** Interaction effects of Sales Managers Caring on a) Emotional Exhaustion and b) Sportsmanship

